PREFACE.

THESE volumes contain fourteen numbers, which are all that were published, of a weekly paper entitled, the PIC NIC. It then received a new form, was submitted to a new direction, and assumed a new name. In short, the PIC NIC was lost in the CABINET, a periodical paper which is now rising in the public estimation. It was however suggested by those whose opinion must ever have a predominent influence in every thing which relates to literature, and the passing history of the world, that the numbers of the PIC NIC should be re-published in the present form, as a faithful mirror of the times, during the short period of its

existence. In that character it is presented to the public.

At the same time, from the title and characteristic circumstances of the work, an opportunity appears to be offered of publishing a faithful and accurate history of the *Society* called the Pic Nic, which was established in *Tottenham-street*, in the winter of 1802.

The illiberal, ill-founded, and it may be added, base opposition, which, from idle notions of violated interest, was raised and encouraged to this innocent and elegant amusement, is well known: it was a general topic of the season, and the public calumny with which it was treated, has no parallel in the history of fashionable life, since daily papers have professionally and notoriously become the venal vehicles of any falsehood.

The origin of this abuse, the motives to this calumny; in short, the *History* of the Pic Nic Society, will form the preliminary part of these volumes; give them, we trust, additional interest; remove every ill impression that has been

conceived against it; and counteract those numerous, false, and foul reports, which involved, more or less, all those persons, however distinguished by rank, character, and virtue, who promoted the institution.

It was originally proposed to have given, at large, this long and disgraceful series of abuse which occupied the columns of the newspapers with little intermission from *February* to *August*: But as some of those papers acknowledged their errors, and were ashamed of their injustice, it might be considered as acting ungraciously towards them, to perpetuate a misconduct for which ample compensation had been made; while there appeared no sufficient reason to renew the disgust of liberal minds at the re-perusal of that systematic calumny which the other papers inveterately continued, long after the winter amusements of the metropolis were terminated. The proposed volume, therefore, which the calumniating extracts from these papers would have filled, will form a part of this publication.

The ORIGIN of the PIC NIC society may be stated in a very few words.

In the early part of the year 1801, Colonel Henry Greville proposed, with the assistance of M. Texier, to give a little theatrical fête to a select party of his acquaintance. It was, indeed, intended to be a very confined exhibition; but the applications for admission were so numerous that the expence became an object of serious consideration. To lessen this inconvenience, it was proposed, that the supper should be PIC NIC, that is, each person invited was to send a dish. Acccording to this regulation the fête took place, and every person present acknowledged the satisfaction of passing an evening of such rational amusement, and divested of the monotony of a rout. In short, so much cheerfulness was seen, and so much honest pleasure enjoyed at this entertainment, that it was proposed to renew it in the following winter, on the plan of a regular establishment, which was to be limited to a certain number of subscribers among persons

of the first fashion, to meet once a fortnight, to enjoy the amusements of acting, music, and dancing, and to conclude with a supper, and catches and glees. Every member was to pay six guineas for his admission ticket for the season, and to send to the cellar six bottles of wine or a guinea. Ladies of high rank were to become patronesses, that persons in the habit of living together might belong to their books, and, at the same time, the eligibility of the subscribers be secured.

The design proceeded with a success that was naturally to be expected from it, and was soon composed of 230 persons, among whom were many of the first rank and distinction in the kingdom. A little theatre was erected at the old concert rooms in Tottenham-street; a few French and English pieces were got up by some amateurs, and the orchestra was filled with gentlemen performers. At nine the curtain drew up; at eleven, or sometimes a little later, the performance concluded; supper was immediately served; and after a few catches and

glees, the party dispersed. No lady was among the actresses, nor were cards or dice introduced. The surplus that might remain at the conclusion of the season, was to be presented to the fund for decayed actors and actresses.

The ladies and gentlemen who accepted the office of Lady Patronesses and Managers were,

The Duchess of Devonshire.
The Marchioness of Salisbury.
The Countess of Cholmondeley.
The Countess of Buckinghamshire.
Countess Mount Edgcumbe.
Viscountess Melbourne.
Viscountess Dungannon.
Lady Templeton.
Hon. Mrs. Damer.
Mrs. Crewe.

Managers.

The Earl of Cholmondeley.
The Earl of Mount Edgcumbe.
Hon. P. Lamb.
William Spencer, Esq.
T. Sheridan, Esq.
William Maddox, Esq.

Director for the whole Establishment.

HENRY FRANCIS GREVILLE, ESQ.

R. BULLOCK, Secretary.

Such is the fair, unvarnished account of an establishment which, though formed for innocent amusement, and elegant recreation, and without the least tendency to indecorum or immorality of any kind, was most violently attacked by the public prints, whose calumny and falsehood, in all their various shapes, were employed to give to the world the most infamous, because they were ill-founded impressions, of its character, its conduct, and its objects. But this scheme of hostility will be easily traced, as it will be readily understood, when it is known, that the plan of amusement, already described, was considered as militating against the interest of Drury-lane and Covent-Garden theatres. This appeared at least to be the opinion of Mr. Sheridan, who acted upon it in a manner altogether inconsistent with the

general opinion formed of his good humour and understanding; for, some time after preparations had been making for opening the rooms, Mr. T. Sheridan, then one of the Managers, informed Col. Greville, that his father considered the institution as injurious to the property of Drury-lane theatre; and, odious as a monopoly might be, he should conceive himself obliged to support that of the Theatres against any open or latent designs. It was also added, that the proposed entertainments were in opposition to existing statutes. Col. Greville answered, that no infringement of private property was thought of, much less intended, and that very able lawyers supported the legality of the meetings. Mr. T. Sheridan then replied, that he had it in commission from his father to say, that he would use all the means in his power to crush the undertaking.

On the following day the newspapers in a body commenced an attack on the club, which, for its indecency, scurrility, and falsehood, and it is saying all that

can be said as to its inveteracy, is not to be equalled in the pages of the London newspapers.

The circumstance of the card published in the Morning Post, as containing the rules of the society, and represented as having been issued by Col. Greville, requires a particular discussion, and will clearly evince the kind of spirit which influenced the hostilities declared by Mr. Sheridan.

This card was one of four which was struck off as a proof for the Director's private inspection, and was considered by him as very well adapted for the purpose of issuing to the subscribers. The Managers, however, thought otherwise, and accordingly the first part of the rules was struck out; and, from the corrected copy, 400 tickets were ordered to be printed for the purpose of distribution: but some of the managers, and among the rest Mr. T. Sheridan himself, objected to any printed rules; from the danger of their creeping into the public papers; and that gentleman laughingly observed,

that, after such an opposition had shewn itself, his name would not appear with much propriety among the promoters of the scheme. Accordingly the cards were all burned at the Printer's, and supplied by a circular letter written to each Lady Patroness.

Previous, however, to the appearance of this card in the Morning Post, Mr. Sheridan the elder, as proprietor of Drury lane Theatre, sent Col. Greville a letter, by his son, in which he avowed his determination to oppose by all legal means, and fair exertions, the institution which was about to be established. This letter is as follows:

"DEAR SIR,

"My son has mentioned to me, that you were desirous of seeing the "*final arrangement*" respecting the established theatres, which received the sanction of his Majesty, signified by the Lord Chamberlain's name to the deed, as well as that of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, and of his Grace the Duke of

Bedford. As I owe you, in respect to old acquaintance, every attention and civility, I shall direct a copy of the material passage to be sent to you, as well as any other information you may wish to have. You will see at once, that any attempt to open another theatre, on however reduced a scale, or on whatever pretences money is to be paid for being present at the performances, is directly contrary to the pledge contained in that settlement, upon faith of which, the immense sum expended on Drury-lane Theatre has been raised; and consequently, that the proprietors of the established theatres are, on the first endeavour at innovation, bound to appeal to the protection of the exalted persons I have stated to have guaranteed their property; and from whose justice, they are confident of support.

"I think it also proper frankly to apprize you, that, independently of such an appeal, of whose efficacy however, I have no doubt, I feel myself bound by every just consideration, to oppose, by

all legal and fair exertions, a scheme which, though certainly not so intended, leads in my opinion to the utter destruction of the property of the established theatres.

"I have the honour, &c.

Feb. 17, 1802. "R. B. SHERIDAN."

H. Greville, Esq.

To this letter Col. Greville immediately wrote the following answer:

"DEAR SIR,

"I am fully satisfied it can neither be your wish or intention, to endeavour to throw unnecessary difficulties in the way of private and innocent amusements, as you may equally be assured it is far from mine to aim at injuring, by any establishment I may consent to direct, either your property, or the interest of the individuals connected with the Drury-lane or Covent-garden Playhouses.

"Much wilful and wicked misrepresentation, on the subject of your letter,

has found its way into the public newspapers; and I trust, if, as I have no doubt will be the case, I shall make it clear to you, that the meeting proposed to be held at the Tottenham-street Rooms, which I have hired for the season, for the use of the Subscribers, is neither illegal, immoral, or likely to interfere in the smallest degree (either at present or in future) with the Theatres, that you will publicly disavow the hasty, and I trust, unfounded fears you have expressed, and leave no pretence for malicious and interested individuals to propagate falsehoods, the absurdity of which, however apparent to reasonable minds, may not be equally so to a stirred-up mob.

"I shall be happy to have the honour of waiting upon you, any hour you shall name; when I will frankly and unreservedly communicate to you the plan of the proposed institution; also my motives for pursuing it, notwithstanding your wishes to the contrary; as I have

good reasons for conceiving I am fully authorised to do so by law.

"I have the honour, &c.

"H. F. GREVILLE."

Stratton-Street, Feb. 17, 1802.

To R. B. Sheridan, Esq.

Such was Col. Greville's letter to Mr. Sheridan; but that Gentleman's offer to explain satisfactorily to him the real objects he had in view, as well as to wait upon him, were treated with the same disregard as his own written promise to send the extracts he mentions in his letter. In this situation, with such an extraordinary hostility conjuring up against him, Colonel Greville thought it right to get back the paper of rules already alluded to, which had been entrusted to Mr. Thomas Sheridan, on his solemn promise of its being returned. On the necessary application for it, that gentleman declared, it had been lent to Prince William of Gloucester, who had never restored it; and accompanied this declaration with an express assurance that no improper use should be made

of it. Nevertheless, extraordinary and incredible as it may appear, within two days after this solemn declaration and assurance, the card was exultingly announced in the Morning Post for publication. Astonished at this circumstance, Col. Greville, who well knew that every copy of the card, except that which he felt so much anxiety to recover, was out of the reach of unfair usage, applied to Prince William on the occasion, who assured him that the card had been no longer in his possession, than the time necessary to peruse its contents: and when Col. Greville reproached Mr. T. Sheridan with having so wantonly exposed the institution and its subscribers to the foul attack of an illiberal editor of a newspaper, and in direct contradiction to his own most solemn promises, he declared that he had not the smallest intention of breaking his word; but that, pressed by his father to find the paper, which he had assured him again and again was not in his possession, he

had, to his utter astonishment, found it in his pocket; and in giving it to him, was not aware of the use he intended to make of it; though he acknowledged his father received it with an exclamation, that he would not have lost it for five hundred pounds.

The mode of publishing this card was disingenuous in the extreme, as it appeared to have been done by Col. Greville's authority, and was certainly intended to exasperate the protectors of the institution against him, as having, contrary to their avowed wishes and opinions, exposed their names to public notice and animadversion.

The first object of the Director, on this wanton violation of truth on the part of the newspapers, and of fairness on that of Mr. R. B. Sheridan, was to call at the Morning Post Office, with a letter, explaining the objects of the establishment. But, observing a reluctance in the person attending there, to give it a favourable reception, it was urged as a matter of justice that, as a mischievous

falsehood had been propagated in the Morning Post, the same paper ought to receive an answer, by the person alone capable of giving it; but the only satisfaction that could be obtained was, a promise, if the editor should refuse to insert the letter, that it should be returned, and Col. Greville's address was given for that purpose. It was, however, neither inserted or returned; while a succession of malevolent paragraphs, and wilful misrepresentations, respecting the club, continued to appear in the columns of the Morning Post, not merely to the disgrace of the paper, but of the press.

The Oracle also thought it consistent to maintain an equal character for falsehood and injustice: for the editor of that paper having inserted a letter favourable to the views of the Pic Nic, Col. Greville was encouraged, by this apparent candour, to call at his office with a short letter, requesting him to rectify a very gross error, which had been most industriously propagated;

that play was allowed in the new club; when, on the contrary, there was a strong and particular regulation not to admit it. It will scarcely be believed, but the fact is, that the only notice taken of his letter, was to give the lie direct to it, in a paragraph to the following purport: "The public, perhaps, are not aware, that *deep play* and *private rooms* form a conspicuous part of the rules of the new club in Tottenham-street."

On the refusal of the Morning Post to contradict its calumnies, another paper was tried; when a refusal was given, on the principle that it involved the interests of a brother editor.

Thus, being deprived of the means of commanding a single avenue to the public notice, as every morning and evening paper was, at this time in a state of avowed hostility to the institution, Col. Greville determined on a measure, which, though it has been the subject of censure, seems to be fairly justified by the circumstances of the moment; and

that was, to publiſh a hand-bill. It was an act dictated by necessity, and seems to have been altogether requisite to keep the club alive till its opening. Besides, his character, and that of many of the most respectable persons in high life, was involved in it. He had embarked with them in an undertaking of which he had been appointed the Director; nor could he relinquish it, without appearing to justify the charges, however false and ill-founded, of having engaged to regulate a most pernicious system of immorality. He therefore seems to have employed the only means in his power, to inform the public of the real state of the case, and the abominable falsehoods which were directed against the views and character of the society in which he stood the prominent object. Besides, there was nothing surely in Mr. Sheridan's opposition, of such a terrific or commanding nature, that was to deter Col. Greville from proceeding. That gentleman's apprehensions, suspicions, and misconceptions, respecting the conduct of the society, and a supposed latent de-

sign of procuring a third theatre, had no greater claim to attention or regard than those of any other individual. His behaviour had been such as was neither called for by the occasion, nor was it to be expected from his understanding, or liberal spirit. The first should have disposed him to assist the undertaking, as a school of theatric genius: while the latter ſhould have urged him, with an honourable ſolicitude, to check and oppoſe, inſtead of countenancing, the monſtrous lies and groſs indecencies levelled againſt a ſociety, the members of which, from his long and intimate acquaintance with many of them, he muſt have known to be incapable of illiberal or immoral conduct. He well knew, that a hint from him would have ſilenced all the clamours which were raiſed to ſupport the fancied claims of the Theatres, and which he had thought proper to encourage. For when the *Corps Paragraphique* waited upon him, to offer their ſervices againſt the amuſements in Tottenham-ſtreet, in any way which he

should suggest, or in their own appropriate language, to go through *thick and thin*, on the occasion, he *encouraged* them to proceed, with the *solitary stipulation* that *names* should be spared.

It may, however, be imputed to Col. Greville, that he acknowledged Mr. Sheridan's right to interfere in the Tottenham-street entertainments, by afterwards signifying, nay signing, his consent to confine the performance of plays to ten nights, and engaging not to form a dramatic company, but with the approbation of the proprietors of the winter theatres. To this imputation it may be answered, that he did not adopt this measure from any apprehension of the theatrical patents, or any existing statutes, as the Tottenham-street club was justified in its proceedings by the first legal opinions; but it was to comply with the apprehensive solicitations of several of the subscribers, who, though they did not fear Mr. Sheridan's threats, nor had the least apprehension of constables, round-houses, and mobs, with

which the subscribers had been threatened, felt uncomfortable at the sly insinuations, bitter sarcasms, and scandalous hostilities of the daily papers, which were in full cry against every thing and every body connected with the undertaking. Nor after all, will it be denied, that certain subscribers, to the amount of seventy, were induced, from the terror of newspaper scurrility, to withdraw their names, which occasioned a loss of four hundred and twenty pounds, that would have been appropriated to charitable purposes.

Nevertheless, with all these discouragements; the directors threatened with prosecutions; the actresses treated as strumpets; the amateurs represented as spies, Jacobins, and adventurers; and the whole society made the object of daily ridicule and falsehood, in the public prints; the wonder is, that during eight evenings, a numerous assemblage of persons of high rank and distinction attended the meetings, and expressed their satisfaction at the entertainments presented to them.

Much more might be added; and were it wished to gratify a vindictive spirit of retaliation, many a curious, disgraceful anecdote might be inserted. But the object being no other than to clear, in a candid, convincing, gentlemanly manner, the members of the Pic Nic society from the charges made against it, and to do away any unfavourable impressions which may still remain; not a trait of the venal malignity and scurrilous falsehood of its opponents has been repeated, but such as was necessary to prove the spirit that influenced them in attacking an establishment, whose vital principles were honour and a sense of propriety, and the whole series of whose amusements were shaped and contrived with a most scrupulous attention to decorum, good manners, and social virtue.

Had the Pic Nic society continued, the following proposals would have been submitted to the public.

PROPOSALS for the establishment of a club, to consist of 400 gentlemen, paying annually ten guineas: and 200 ladies paying five guineas each.

THIS SOCIETY to be considered as an assistant, not a rival, of the regular drama of the country; and from the patronage it offers, as capable of serving essentially the rising genius to be found in this metropolis. The lovers of the arts, the lovers of the drama, the lovers of music, and the lovers of chearful amusement, will all find their advantage in patronizing such an institution.

A committee of seven persons to direct the concerns of the club.

Twelve ladies of distinction to be solicited to keep books, and to be considered as members of the society: each of them to have the liberty, on nights of representation, to give away five tickets.

The tickets not to be transferable.

Foreigners of distinction to be admitted by the Lady Patronesses.

A couple of fêtes to be given by the society during the season.

Rooms to be open every morning with proper attendants.

Artists invited to hang up their pictures, or deposit their busts and statues in the rooms.

Principal artists in painting and sculptor to be made honorary members of the society.

There shall be two or three concerts as may be agreed upon, at which no person shall perform who has already appeared in public.

There shall be twelve dramatic representations during the season. Four new and entire dramas; two tragic and two comic, in English.

There shall be no after-piece.

At these representations there shall be a military band only.

The plays to be the property of their authors, who will be at liberty to offer them to the proprietors of either of the Royal Theatres.

There shall be four prizes appointed to these authors: viz. 50l. 40l. 30l. and 20l.

A committee of five gentlemen shall manage the concerns of the stage.

A committee of five other gentlemen shall examine the plays presented, and make the proper selection for every year. All tenders of dramatic pieces shall be anonymous, but be distinguished by some classical quotations.

Authors are not to embarrass the stage with spectacles, nor the performers with singing.

No prologue, epilogue, or song, shall be performed, unless it be specially written for the society.

The proprietors of Drury-lane and of Covent-Garden shall be invited to belong to the regulating committee of this society.

The performers shall be such as expect to succeed in the dramatic line.

Gentlemen amateurs *may act* with the consent of the committee.

On no account shall there be more than *twelve* performances during the season.

The first representation shall take

place on the first Thursday in November, and be repeated every fortnight till the twelve representations have been given.

By thus associating the proprietors of the winter theatres with the managers and conductors of this establishment, the former ensure themselves from the possibility of any infringement or injury to their property that they may apprehend.

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